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## THE MUSICAL TIMES, And Singing Class Circular.

With which is incorporated "THE MUSICAL REVIEW."  
AUGUST 1st, 1852.

### FIRST PERFORMANCE OF HANDEL'S "MESSIAH."

IN the number of *Faulkner's Journal* (Dublin) for March 23rd to 27th, 1742, is the following important notice, which is not the less interesting, that its appearance in the columns of the Dublin journals, on the morning of Saturday, the 27th of March, was the first occasion on which the words "*Handel's Oratorio the MESSIAH*," ever appeared in print, or met the public eye:—

"For Relief of the Prisoners in the several Gaols, and for the Support of Mercer's Hospital in Stephen's-street, and of the Charitable Infirmary on the Inn's Quay, on Monday the 12th of April, will be performed at the Musick Hall in Fishamble-street, *Mr. Handel's new Grand Oratorio, called the MESSIAH*, in which the Gentlemen of the Choirs of both Cathedrals will assist, with some Concertos on the Organ, by Mr. Handel. Tickets to be had at the Musick Hall, and at Mr. Neal's in Christ Church-yard, at half a Guinea each. N.B. No Person will be admitted to the Rehearsal without a Rehearsal Ticket, which will be given gratis with the Ticket for the Performance when payed for.\*"

Immediately after appeared the following announcement:—

"On Thursday next, being the 8th Inst., at the Musick Hall in Fishamble-street, will be the Rehearsal of Mr. Handel's new Grand Sacred Oratorio, called *The MESSIAH*, in which the Gentlemen of both Choirs will assist: with some Concertos on the Organ by Mr. Handel. The Doors will be opened at Eleven, and no Person to be admitted without a Rehearsal Ticket, which is given gratis with the Tickets for the Performance, when paid for. Tickets to be had at the Musick Hall, and at Mr. Neal's in Christ Church-yard, at Half a Guinea each."

This announcement is followed by a repetition of the notice—"For Relief of the Prisoners." &c.

These advertisements are severally repeated in the number of *Faulkner* for April 3rd to 6th.

It may be observed, that in the advertisements of the subscription concerts, though concertos on the organ are always announced, yet Handel is not mentioned as a performer. But in the advertisements of the *first* performance of the *Messiah* (and in no other advertisement), it is specially stated that there will be "*Concertos on the Organ by Mr. Handel*." In the previous concerts, he may be presumed to have left the organ, in general, if not entirely, to Mr. Maclaine, the excellent organist whom he had brought with him from England: but he seems to have thought it right to distinguish the first production of his new oratorio, by advertising his own performance on the organ for the occasion.

\* This advertisement appears in the *Dublin News-Letter* of the same date; with the addition, that at the places mentioned for the sale of tickets, "*Books are also to be had at a British shilling each*." In this number of the *Dublin News-Letter*, the expression is, "*New Grand Sacred Oratorio*."

Whether the oratorio of the *Messiah* had been publicly performed in London, previously to Handel's setting out for Ireland, and whether at that performance it had been coldly received, are questions concerning which there has been a controversy, on the merits of which it is hoped some light will be thrown by the present narrative, and by the following statement of the evidence on both sides.

For the position that the *Messiah* was performed in London, and coldly received there, previously to Handel's visit to Dublin, the original authority (so far as all subsequent writers seem to have been acquainted) is the *Memoirs of the Life of Handel*, published anonymously in London, in 1760, the year after Handel's death. † In these memoirs, it is asserted that the *Messiah* was performed, and "met with a cold reception" in London, in the year 1741, previously to Handel's visit to Ireland; and that this was among the circumstances which induced Handel to leave England for a while. These assertions have been adopted and repeated by a host of writers down to the present day. Two writers on Musical History, Mr. Hogarth and Mr. Stafford, endeavour to adduce a piece of evidence in support of this theory. They affirm that a memorandum in Handel's own handwriting, in the original score, proves that this oratorio, finished on Saturday, the 12th of September, was performed on Monday, the 14th. It is surprising that such a supposition should have been thus easily adopted. But the error of these writers has been shewn to arise from their mistaking a German word in a supplementary memorandum at the end of the work, which signifies, not that the oratorio was performed, but that the writing or composition of the music was finished, completed, or filled up, on the 14th of September. ‡ Other writers adduce no evidence. They merely echo the assertion of Mr. Mainwaring. Sir John Hawkins says, "The *Messiah* was first performed at Covent Garden in the year 1741, by the name of a Sacred Oratorio. As it consisted chiefly of chorus, and the airs contained in it were greatly inferior to most in his operas and former oratorios, it was but coldly received by the audience; the consciousness whereof, and a suspicion that the public were growing indifferent towards these entertainments, determined him to try the temper of the people of Ireland." Dr. Busby repeats the same story; but finds the rationale of the unfavourable reception, "*in the words*." "Recollecting," he says, "that the words are sacred, we are obliged to seek it in the want of a consistent and dramatic series of incidents." Such is the state of

† The author of this book was Mr. Mainwaring. Dr. Burney cites the work as the original authority for the assertion.

‡ In the original score of the *Messiah*, the supplementary memorandum in German, (after "Fine dell' Oratorio," &c.) is "*ausgefüllt den 14 diceses*."

evidence (amounting, in fact, to a mere assertion) for the position that the *Messiah* was first performed in London, and coldly received, previously to Handel's visit to Dublin.

On the other hand, the evidence demonstrating the opposite position, that the first performance of the *Messiah* was in Dublin during the visit of Handel, is clear and satisfactory. For the better understanding of this evidence, let it be borne in mind, that the composition of the *Messiah* was concluded on the 12th (or 14th) of September, 1741. Handel arrived in Dublin on the 18th of November following. Allowing about a fortnight, including his delay at Chester, for his journey from London to Dublin, he must have quitted London on (we will say) the 4th of November. Seven weeks, then, and a few days over, was all that elapsed between the concluding of the oratorio and his quitting London; and it must have been in this interval, that the alleged performance and cold reception of the *Messiah* in London, previously to Handel's coming to Ireland, took place, if it did take place at all.\* Bearing this fact, then, in mind, the following is the evidence that the first performance of the *Messiah* took place in Dublin:—

I. In the London newspapers of the time, in which all the performances of Handel's works are chronologically recorded, no mention is made of any performance of the *Messiah* in London, or anywhere else, previously to Handel's visit to Dublin. The fact of its performance would have been mentioned, had it taken place. But no such notice or advertisement is to be found in the London newspapers: nor until the year 1743 (the year after Handel's return from Ireland), when the oratorio of *Samson* was performed, and afterwards the *Messiah*, do we find any intimation of a performance of the *Messiah* in London. Dr. Burney, and all authorities, describe its reception *then*, as being marked with universal admiration and applause.

II. Dr. Burney, who went to London in 1744, and was well acquainted with Handel, and performed in his band, and took every opportunity, as he tells us, of becoming acquainted with the manners and character of so extraordinary a man, would, it is to be presumed, have heard among the musicians of Handel's band, and among other musicians, and from other people, of the alleged performance and cold reception of this celebrated oratorio, if such had taken place; more especially as this oratorio was the theme of the admiration of the musical profession, and of the public in general. But it does not seem that he ever heard of such an event, till the publication of the Me-

moirs of Handel, in 1760. Twenty-eight years afterwards, writing to his friend Dr. Quin, of Dublin, on the subject of the alleged performance, concerning which he was then making diligent inquiry, Dr. Burney says it was a fact "of which the round assertion of Handel's biographer, Mr. Mainwaring, never convinced *him*."

III. Dr. Burney, when compiling materials for the fourth volume of his History of Music, which he published in 1789, took, as he informs us, "considerable pains to obtain a minute and accurate account of the musical transactions of the great musician, during his residence in Ireland." Dr. Burney was in habits of extensive acquaintance with literary and musical society in the metropolis, and throughout England; a circumstance which, added to the zeal and interest with which he prosecuted his inquiries, rendered him peculiarly competent to elicit any latent fragment of evidence on the point. And yet, after diligent inquiry, he could find no particle of evidence that the *Messiah* had been performed and coldly received in England, previously to Handel's departure for Ireland. Of such reported performance he says, it is "a fact which I am glad to find impossible to ascertain, either by the newspapers of the times in which all his other public performances, sacred and secular, are chronologically recorded, or by the testimony of persons still living, who remember the performance of the *Messiah* in Dublin, and of his oratorios previous to that period in England." Among the testimonies adduced by Dr. Burney, is that of Dr. Quin, who had known Handel in Dublin, and who, in a letter to Burney, dated July, 1788, says, "The *Messiah*, I am convinced, was performed in Dublin for the first time, and with the greatest applause." Dr. Burney, also, cites the authority of Mrs. Arne, wife of Dr. Arne, the composer, who went to Ireland with her husband in 1742, where they remained till 1744, and who, he says, "has not the least doubt of the *Messiah* having been performed there for the first time."†

To these testimonies I will add the tradition or opinion preserved among the members of the choirs of the Cathedrals of Christ Church and St. Patrick, and of the Chapel of Trinity College, Dublin, that the *Messiah* was first performed in Dublin.

IV. The anecdote related by Dr. Burney, of Handel at Chester, on his way to Ireland, *proving* some manuscript choruses of the *Messiah*, which he intended to perform in Ireland, and which had been hastily transcribed, negatives the supposition

\* As respects the argument concerning the first performance of the *Messiah*, the interval of seven weeks here limited, might perhaps be further abridged, when it is recollected that the composition of the first part of *Samson* was finished on the 29th of September. It is unlikely that in the interval between the 14th and 29th, during which Handel was engaged on this composition, he should have found time for rehearsals and a performance of the *Messiah*.

† Hist. of Music, vol. iv. p. 662. When Dr. Burney wrote the Sketch of the Life of Handel, prefixed to the account of the Commemoration in Westminster Abbey, he was evidently in some uncertainty on this point, and was anxious to relieve England from the disgrace of rejecting (even once only) so noble a work as the *Messiah*, by ascribing any such rejection "to the resentment of the many great personages whom Handel had offended by refusing to compose for Senesino." In the fourth volume of the History of Music, published four years later, Dr. Burney gives the result of the inquiries he had been making in the interval.

that they had been previously performed, and is quite in keeping with the rest of the evidence.\*

V. In a notice subjoined to the account given in *Faulkner*, of the rehearsal of the *Messiah* at the Music-Hall in Dublin, it is stated that this oratorio was composed for the charity for whose benefit the performance was given. Handel, who was a man of high honour and integrity, never could have sanctioned such an impression on the minds of the committee, who inserted that notice, had there been a previous performance of this oratorio for any other purpose than this very charity.

VI. In the letter already given,† dated Dublin, December 29, 1741, from Handel to Mr. Jennens, the following passage occurs:—"It was with the greatest pleasure I saw the continuation of your kindness, by the lines you was pleased to send me, in order to be prefixed to your Oratorio *Messiah*, which I set to Musick before I left England."

It cannot be supposed that Handel would express himself thus, if there had been a performance of the oratorio before he left England. Had such been the case, Mr. Jennens, a man of eminent literary and artistic acquirements, who frequently visited London, and was inquisitive about every event in the world of literature and art, must have heard of the performance of the oratorio, of which the words were selected by himself; and so must thousands of persons besides. And to suppose Handel, under such circumstances, when he had been several weeks in Dublin, writing to his friend, acknowledging having received from him certain words to be prefixed in the title-page of the oratorio, and, silent as to the performance, communicating to him as a piece of news, the fact that he had set the words of the oratorio to music (!) is to suppose an absurdity which needs not the parade of a formal refutation.

From all these premises, we arrive with perfect certainty at the conclusion, that no performance of the *Messiah* took place in London till after Handel's return from Ireland; and that Dublin may rightfully claim the honour of being first to witness and applaud this sublime and immortal work.

[The above condensed summary is from "An Account of the Visit of Handel to Dublin," by Horatio Townsend; a pleasant volume in which those who take an interest in this controversy will find many additional details in the evidence collected by Mr. Townsend, to fortify his position, that Handel's Oratorio, *The Messiah*, was produced for the first time in Dublin.—*Ed. M. T.*]

\* The account given of this transaction by Mr. W. Gardiner, in his amusing volumes, "Music and Friends" (published in 1838), is, that "the composer wished to enlist some choristers." But Mr. Gardiner, who was not born until thirty years after the occurrence, gives no reason for departing from Dr. Burney's narrative, nor for adopting and repeating the story of the previous performance and failure of the *Messiah*, without even an allusion to Dr. Burney's reasoning and deliberate opinion on the subject.

† An Account of Handel's Visit to Ireland, p. 50.

#### A FEW WORDS ON THE MUSICAL INSTITUTIONS.

THE unusual shortness of the London Season has had the effect of bringing the concerts and other musical entertainments customarily held during that time, to a premature close; the last of the annual musical meetings being that given on the 2nd of July, for the benefit of the Choral Fund—an institution having for its object the alleviation of the suffering and distress of aged and infirm professed musicians.

In alluding to this subject, it may not be out of place to call attention to the many claims which such institutions have upon the consideration of all the professors of the art in connection with which they are established; nor are these details alone interesting to such parties: they appeal with equal force to the public for their sympathy and support. The nature of the pursuits of a musician seldom affords him an opportunity to do more than "keep the wolf from the door;" there are exceptions to this, as to every other rule, of course; but those exceptions are mostly confined to the possessors of genius. No lucky strokes of fortune, as in the commercial world, ever visit the musician—he works for all he gets, and what he gets is seldom more than sufficient to pay his way. Our experience amongst members of the general profession abundantly confirms this view of the subject. Indeed, we have known men of high musical and general education—of habits of the strictest probity and economy, whose families, after their decease, have been saved from want by the judicious application of the funds of musical benevolent institutions. A case very recently came to our knowledge, in which a well-known orchestral performer, on retiring from a first-rate position in the profession—one which he had held for nearly half a century, was only too glad to accept the annual allowance granted to all the members of the musical benevolent institution to which he belonged. It was known that this gentleman's life had been marked by prudence and economy: his character was universally respected—and the position he had assumed, in a social point of view, was merely that of an inexpensive respectability.

These facts strongly urge upon the mind, that although, generally speaking, more talent than usual in other professions is required to make a man eminent in the science of music, the remuneration for that talent is on too small a scale. We are quite aware that large sums are spent in the encouragement of the art, but then the fact forces itself upon our attention that the principal part of those sums are lavished upon the fortunate few; without, however, staying to consider the causes which lead to this unequal distribution, we pursue our intention of placing before the profession and the public the claims which the musical benevolent institutions have on their sympathy and support.

The Royal Society, which has been established ever since the year 1738, is the oldest musical association. It dispenses its funds with a liberal though not a prodigal hand. Many of our best-known instrumental performers have owed the comfort of the last few years of their life to the aid which this society has afforded them when unable to endure the fatigue of gaining their livelihood. We have heard it objected, that vocal performers are not eligible for election; but when we reflect that the choral body of the profession were provided for by the establishment of "The Choral Fund," in 1791, we think the objection in a